

Interviewee: John Kline

Interviewer: Thomas Saylor

Date: 10 April 2003

Location: basement of Kline home, Burnsville, MN

Transcribed by: Linda Gerber, April 2003

Edited by: Thomas Saylor, December 2003

John Kline was born on 10 January 1925 in Glen Ayre, Indiana, near Terre Haute. He attended local country school, completing high school in April 1943. The next month John was inducted into the US Army. He completed Basic Training at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, and then spent time in the Army Specialized Training Program (ATSP). When this program was disbanded, John was sent to the 106th Infantry Division, and assigned to the 423rd Regiment, to a machine gun crew.

In September 1944 this unit shipped out to Europe. Sent to the line near St. Vith, Belgium, John's unit was overrun by the German offensive in December 1944, and on 19 December 1944, with more than a thousand other Americans, he was captured by the Germans.

John spent the next four months as a POW in Germany, at camps IV-B (Mühlberg), VIII-A (Görlitz) and, after a two month, 415 mile march, in the city of Helmstedt, Germany. Conditions steadily worsened, and hunger and disease claimed the lives of many. John was finally liberated when advancing US troops overran Helmstedt on 13 April 1945. John was moved to a field evacuation hospital, then to Paris, and finally in early May 1945 to the United States; he spent the time until his discharge in December 1945 at a military hospital in Indiana, and at home in Terre Haute.

Again a civilian, John worked many years in sales in the Midwest region, before moving in the late 1950s to the insurance field. He and his wife Bettie (married 1943) raised a family of three boys. Bettie died in 1977, and John remarried in 1978 (wife Margot). At the time of this interview John Kline lived in Burnsville, Minnesota.

Interview Key:

T = Thomas Saylor

J = John Kline

[text] = words added by editor, either for clarification or explanation

(*) = words or phrase unclear**

NOTE: interview has been edited for clarity

Tape 1, Side A. Counter begins at 000.

T: This is an interview for the POW Oral History Project. My name is Thomas Saylor. Today is 10 April 2003, and this is an interview with Mr. John Kline of Burnsville, Minnesota. First, Mr. Kline, on the record, thanks very much for taking time to speak with me today.

J: Thank you.

T: We've talked a little bit so far and there's a lot of information on your website which I will not add into the official record here, but add later. Let me ask you, you finished high school in 1942. Is that right?

J: 1943.

T: And it was soon thereafter that were drafted into the service.

J: One week later I got called to the Draft Board.

T: One week. They didn't waste any time, did they?

J: No (*both laugh*).

T: That means you were a junior in high school when the US became involved in the war.

J: Yes.

T: Specifically the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. I'm wondering what you doing when you first heard that news.

J: You know, I've been asked that question many times and I cannot remember what I was doing. I was a junior in high school and those days seem to have escaped me. I know a lot of people know exactly what they were doing. They were listening to a radio or reading the newspaper. I cannot give you any definite answer.

T: Okay. Thank you. Once you became aware of the news, in the newspapers or at school or whatever, how did you find yourself or your family members, your mom and dad, or people at school reacting to this news?

J: That's another good question which I have not much input to. I cannot remember too much about that type of a reaction. Like that would have been during my senior year for instance.

T: Yes. Junior year actually.

J: Junior year when it started. But, yes, there was news about the war. I'm sure there was, but for me to remember those... I just have a hard time remembering. We were so engaged in playing basketball and going through our high school and doing our things, that I don't remember too much about that.

T: Very interesting.

J: Yes.

T: One thing that became apparent, I hope, during your senior year, was that military service was most likely in your future.

J: Yes.

T: Young men were leaving. Did you find yourself thinking about that? Wondering about that? How this was going to impact you?

J: Yes. I think we were thinking about it. For instance, I had my sights, when I got drafted, to get into the Signal Corps because I was into photography. I was president of the Camera Club and had my own darkroom. I thought well, I can get drafted and I can ask them for the Signal Corps, which I did. But in those days, whatever you asked for you never got (*laughs*). So I ended up in for Infantry Basic Training.

(1, A, 57)

T: Did you consider enlisting or were you content to wait to be drafted?

J: I didn't have to wait very long. My draft notice was there before I got out of high school.

T: So you knew what you were headed to when you got out.

J: Yes.

T: Okay. How did you react, how did your parents react when you got the draft notice? After all, you're an only child.

J: Yes. I think they expected it. In those days the draft had been going on and on and on and people were leaving the villages and going to war. I don't know what their

exact reactions were, what they thought personally between the two of them, but they knew it was going to happen. So we were doing what we were supposed to do.

T: Basic Training for you was Camp Wheeler, Georgia. Is that right?

J: Yes.

T: What kind of memories do you have of the Basic Training experience?

J: The Basic Training experience?

T: Yes.

J: You should ask me what I thought of Camp Wheeler, Georgia.

T: Okay. What did you think of Camp Wheeler, Georgia, Mr. Kline?

J: It's the hellhole of the earth (*laughs*). We had very good Basic Training, in my estimation. Looking back. Very hot weather and, you know, in Georgia.

T: It was summer, wasn't it?

J: It was summertime. I have a lot of memories about Basic Training, and I did well in Basic Training. As a matter of fact, out of a seven hundred man battalion I was number two with the M-1 rifle. I was always proud of that, because country boys go squirrel hunting and things like that. So they are acquainted with weapons. I did well in Basic Training. I thought it was good Basic Training. What I didn't know during Basic Training, somewhere along the line I had passed a test that qualified me to go to the Army Specialized Training School after Basic Training. Which we didn't learn right until the tail end of Basic Training. So I took my Basic Training in infantry as a rifleman and then when it closed off, when the training closed, they sent me to the University of Alabama to take civil engineering. I tell the story. It's kind of a joke. I don't like to make jokes all the time, but I was not a good math student in high school.

T: You passed this test somehow though.

J: I passed the test. They started throwing calculus at us right away. We were going into engineering. I don't even know if I can spell the word today yet. So that was the atmosphere. But I was good... I was not good in math while I was there. I did become a battalion commander. I wore three gold stripes on my sleeve. My duties were to have roll call at the quadrangle. That was my big duty was in the morning to have roll call. I enjoyed my stay at the University of Alabama.

T: You were there through early 1944, is that right?

J: Six months I think it was. I have to look it up. I'm bad on remembering dates. It was about six months. Then the Army needed bodies because they were shipping people out of divisions for D-Day, and so they had replacements until they took part of us and shipped us to Camp Atterbury, Indiana, where we joined the division. Some of the other soldiers, some of the other ASTP students went elsewhere. I've met with them a couple of times since. I found out a lot of the others went to the south Pacific as engineers. They had had like a year of college, where I hadn't had any.

T: They were further along or had more education.

J: Yes. I hadn't had college. So these guys were shipped out in engineering battalions. And several of them ended up in the south Pacific. I think of one particularly. They were building water plants and various things like that.

T: Thinking to your time at Camp Wheeler, or even in Alabama where you were for a longer period of time, was that the first extended period of time away from home for you?

J: Oh, yes.

T: How did you deal with that?

J: I think there was an acquaintance period where... I remember very distinctly right after I first went into the service they shipped me over to Fort Benjamin Harrison, in Indiana, at Indianapolis. And of course, here you are, in shock, so to speak. I remember wandering through that camp one night just wishing I could get back home like you can't believe. I can still see it in my mind. I was alone. In the evening. Kind of feeling sorry for myself and I can still remember walking down that gravel road around some of the buildings wishing I could get out of there.

(1, A, 140)

T: Would you describe that feeling as just wanting to be back home or looking to the future and being scared or uncertain?

J: I don't think it was that. I just think I was lonely. I was away from what I had been with. That's a good question. I don't remember having any of this fear of what we were going to do at that point in time. It was mostly getting acquainted. It was a period of adjustment where you had to adjust from being next to your family, with your peers in high school, and getting acquainted with the Army life is what it was.

T: A fast transition for you. From the information I read that you wrote, you were in high school. A week later you were drafted. So really, a rapid readjustment time I guess.

J: Yes.

T: From civilian life to military life. Not much time in the middle there.

J: No.

T: Sitting in high school classes one week and a couple weeks later wearing uniforms.

J: I know I was drafted a week later. Went to the Draft Board. I'd have to look at my own records to find out when I first went to the Army. I think it was like a month after that.

T: At Camp Wheeler and in Alabama, both those locations, you must have run into people from all over the United States.

J: Yes.

T: What differences did you observe between people from North and South, East and West?

J: Outside of the language or the vocal inflections, I can't remember anything particularly remarkable. During Basic Training, I think I became very well acquainted with being in this type of a group and outside of some loneliness, I think I got along pretty fine.

(1, A, 171)

T: This time in Alabama, where exactly was this program the Army had?

J: It was at the University of Alabama.

T: Is that in Birmingham?

J: No, no. That's in... where is it? Tuscaloosa?

T: Tuscaloosa. So it's a big...

J: A big university.

T: And a decent size town attached to it, right?

J: Yes.

T: Did you have a chance to go to town at all?

J: Well, we lived right on the edge of town. Our barracks were in the back side of the university and we had some freedom once in a while to walk into town. As a matter of fact, there was a railroad track that went through. We walked down the railroad track and we were in to the university town there. It was a different environment. That part of it was different because I was right out of the Army right into college. Knowing it was a big university and then getting acquainted with the procedure that you had to go through as an Army student. We marched around in groups to go to class. Singing the song: "Take down your service light, mother, your son's in the ASTP."

T: You were in the military, and yet also part of a college.

J: We were in a military environment. We had platoons and companies, and we had squad leaders, and we had battalion leaders and things like that; we were also being broken-in to the service orientation. But the classes to me, coming out of high school, not being a straight A student particularly, not particularly proficient in math, really got to me because, as I said, they were throwing calculus at us right away. I told you my joke. I can't even spell calculus today, and they were throwing calculus and so that sort of... I found an old grade record sheet here a couple months ago. I have it buried away someplace. I wasn't doing well in math. I probably would have flunked out of the program within the next six month period.

T: But they terminated the program and moved you out.

J: They terminated the program.

T: So you had to be moved out anyway.

J: Had to be moved out anyway. Yes.

T: Did you attend classes with just military people or with regular students as well?

J: It was all ASTP. The classes I was in were all soldiers. All soldiers.

T: Okay. How about off-duty life in Tuscaloosa? You're a person coming from the Midwest. How did you observe kind of the life of the normal civilian life of a place in Alabama? It's different from the Midwest.

J: I don't remember exactly, but I was a country boy who wasn't in a town. Let's put it that way. Outside of going down to Terre Haute, Indiana, to go roller-skating or something like that. Or going to the show. So I wasn't raised in a city environment. I recall the town as being not unfriendly particularly. As a matter of fact, we didn't spend a lot of time in town. There wasn't much there for us to do anyhow.

(1, A, 220)

T: So you were content or needed to spend time at the college.

J: Yes. We spend time on our quadrangle. We played football or touch football. Had a lot of studying to do. We had separate rooms. There were two men to a room. And we had a little study desk, and the barracks were cut up into small rooms. We had a certain amount of studying to do.

T: This program in Alabama was terminated by the Army and you were sent to join the 106th Infantry Division which was at a camp in Indiana. Camp Atterbury.

J: Camp Atterbury, Indiana. About thirty miles south of Indianapolis.

T: So close to Bloomington.

J: I don't remember (*laughs*).

T: This time at Camp Atterbury in Indiana, south of Indianapolis, was no longer college classes and learning calculus, was it?

J: Correct. No longer in school. We joined the 106th Infantry Division; when I joined them, I got into the camp about two days before they came off of their Tennessee maneuvers. The Army used to have a lot of big maneuvers in the Tennessee area for training troops. Putting the final touches on the divisions. The 106th had trained at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. They went to the Tennessee maneuvers and then they came to Camp Atterbury. I was there two days before they came in. When I got to the camp there was only three or four of us in the barracks waiting on them to come in. In my particular barracks. And when they came in of course we were new guys in the outfit and we helped clean up their equipment and got settled in, at which time I was appointed as a Jeep driver.

T: Now from your records you didn't stay a Jeep driver very long.

J: I can't remember how long. A month and a half or something like that. I'd have to look at my own records. That's a long time ago. But I was a Jeep driver for the second squad, first platoon. I got tired of polishing the hood of the Jeep, as you would do when the squad was out doing its own thing, and I asked the first sergeant if I could join the squad. I wanted to get into the squad. He took it to the captain and the next morning they said sure. So they put me in as second gunner.

A machine gun squad has a squad leader, a first gunner, a second gunner and four ammunition carriers. They put me in as the gunner. Second gunner. From there on we trained during the summer. We went on our own little maneuvers within the camp. The squad leader got shipped out to port of embarkation to get prepared to go to D-Day landing probably, so I made first gunner. Pretty soon the squad leader got shipped out, and as the squad leader got shipped out they were taking replacements. From our division they took over six thousand enlisted men and six hundred officers. So they really raped the division of its experienced

personnel. That left us ASTP students, coast artillery people, and US Air Force trainees that didn't need the US Air Force anymore. So we were a bunch of hodgepodge replacements who had only had Basic Training. They were trying to fit us into the mold during the summer. I think we did a pretty good job actually. We must have been—excuse this, I don't mean this the way it sounds—but we must have been the most intelligent division in the United States at that time, because half of us were Army Specialized Training students [ASTP] who at least passed the test to go to college. I don't mean that to be the way it sounds.

T: No, I know what you mean.

J: That could be to our benefit or it could be to our detriment. We don't know which.

T: One is tempted to think that your time as a Jeep driver, that might have been a, well, from looking back perspective, an easy way, an easier way, to do your military service. After all, it was perhaps less likely to be in a front line situation. Join an infantry squad you're putting yourself in a different type of situation.

J: Yes.

T: Did those thoughts occur to you when you made that decision to not want to be a Jeep driver anymore?

J: No. I think, you know in my high school, I was sort of a leader in my high school in the sense that I was a basketball player. Became captain of the basketball team. I was the president of the Camera Club. I don't know. Whatever I went after, it seemed like—I'm looking back now—it seemed like I wanted to improve myself and do something a little bit different than just tag along. I think that's what happened in my squad. I just got sick and tired of polishing the hood of the Jeep and figured I'd like to get into the action and get going.

(1, A, 299)

T: To move the story forward. The 106th was shipped over to England in 1944.

J: Yes. November. We were shipped from Camp Atterbury to—you're taxing my memory now. You know, I haven't told this story for a while (*chuckles*). We were shipped to... where did we go?

(Brief pause in tape)

J: I'd like to preface that first. Just prior to shipping out I had been an acting squad leader. A PFC at that time. One stripe. And just prior to shipping out the division has to bring everything up to grade the way—the structure of various appointments, various squad leaders and things like that. So I go to the bulletin board one day and I find out I've made corporal. As a squad leader. A squad leader normally is a

sergeant. But I had made corporal, so my squad and I went down to Edinburg or wherever it was that night, and that's where the wetting down the stripes comes in. There's a tradition in the Army when a guy gets an improvement in rank the guys take him down and they wet down the stripes.

T: Who pays? The person getting promoted or his friends?

J: I don't remember. We never had much money. We were only making, I can't even remember, twenty-one dollars a month or something like that. So we go wet down my stripes, come home, and wake up very sleepy and tired in the morning and look on the bulletin board and I had made sergeant. You had to spend twenty-four hours in grade. So I was a corporal for twenty-four hours, then I made sergeant.

T: Did you have to wet those stripes down too?

J: Yes. We went down that night and we went back the next night. Of course we were young then. I think I made a note in my diary. I remember that night coming home. The second night I was pretty tired because that was the second night of it. We had old camp busses and I happened to get in and took up whatever seat was available and my seat didn't have a backrest in it. Just had a steel bar. I fell asleep going back to camp with my head against a steel bar. In those days you were young and you could sleep in the gravel, you could sleep wherever you wanted to sleep.

T: Without waking up feeling stiff and sore, right?

J: Yes (*both chuckle*). Yes. So we shipped out to Camp Myles Standish. In Massachusetts. I don't remember much about Camp Myles Standish. I really can't. Some people have asked me what it looked like. I can't really remember much about it. But then we were put on a train one night and shipped down to the port of embarkation in New York, and we boarded the *Queen Elizabeth*. Our regiment, the 423rd... the 87th Infantry Division had most of the ship. They had the front and the tail end, and we were in the middle as the 423rd Regiment. They had red, white and blue sections. And you wore a tag.

(1, A, 325)

T: To identify your section.

J: Yes. Red, white or blue. We were in the middle section and we shipped over to Glasgow, Scotland. Firth of Clyde, where the *Queen Elizabeth* would berth. And we shipped over there—I can't remember how many days. It was only three or four days. Quite a ship. I remember being in the stateroom, 9B, which was probably made for honeymooners, but there were nine of us in there.

T: That's cramped quarters.

J: Yes.

T: Were you a person who suffered seasickness at all?

J: No. A little bit, but not violent. What I couldn't stand was the English food. See, this was an English ship and they had greasy, not Indiana style food that I had been used to, and so I ended up not going to the mess hall. I went down to the commissary and bought a chocolate. Bought a box of what they call Mallow Cups. That's like a muffin filled with cream, chocolate. Do you remember those?

T: Yes.

J: I know about them, but I haven't seen any forever. I think that's what I ate all the way over. Even though it was a big ship it was kind of a rough ride. We didn't have sea legs. We hadn't been on the ship...

T: And the seas are rougher that time of year.

J: It was November.

T: Yes. You mention English food, and I wanted to pick up that theme. You were in England for a number of months. I'm wondering, what were your impressions of the English countryside and of the English civilians that you may have come into contact with?

J: I thought it was a beautiful country. Rolling hills where we were at. Cheltenham. We didn't do a lot of field training at that particular time. We went on some marches. But we didn't do a lot of what you would call field training. As a matter of fact we were stationed at the steeplechase track at Cheltenham and my squad had the press box on top of the grandstand.

T: Really?

J: Yes. That was our quarters. It was a pleasant town. To us it was quaint because narrow sidewalks and different types of food and different types of buildings. We were becoming acquainted with the European or the English background. We did a couple of big marches but we weren't out in the field a lot in Cheltenham. We had a lot of briefings and, what would you call them? Campsite type schools. Getting familiar with what we might get into and that type of thing.

T: From your observation, how well did the English and the Americans get along with each other?

J: I remember not badly at all. I wasn't exposed to it a lot. We didn't get to go into town often. Sneak through the fence once in a while and go down and get some French fries or some chips. I think I relate to that in my diary that I ruined my brand

new field jacket because it was raining and I stuffed the French fries inside (*chuckles*).

T: Packed in newspaper you said, too.

J: Yes. Fish and chips. I think they roll them up in a newspaper. When newspaper gets wet it's already got grease inside of it.

T: It must have made a mess in your coat.

J: It was a mess. Yes.

T: You retain pleasant memories about that time. About the countryside, the people.

J: Yes I do. Yes. I think I relate [in] my diary that we didn't see a lot of battle damage at that time. A lot of bombing damage. We saw a bomber that had hit the ground and broken up on one of our marches. That's about the only experience that I can remember. I remember a lot of ammunition being stored along the road. When we would go out for a small, for a five mile hike or something like that, there was a lot of ammunition stored along the roads. They had like culverts, half-culverts. They were put over and the artillery ammunition stored along the roads. That's about my only experience with that.

T: Did you feel yourself to be in any way closer to the war. I mean in Camp Atterbury, Indiana, the war was far, far away. Was Britain closer to the war for you, or was it still far away?

J: I think it was closer, but we still didn't have any realization of what we were really going to get into. There was no bombing at that time. The German Air Force was pretty well down at that time. Maybe if we had been there amongst the earliest troops we would have experienced some of that, but... we weren't really in harm's way where we were at in Cheltenham, as far as that goes.

T: How would that answer change once you were sent to Belgium in December? Because there you did take up front line positions.

J: Yes. We shipped out of Cheltenham and went to Southampton and we were put aboard various types of boats or ships, whatever you want to call them. Shipped across the Channel.

T: This is your whole regiment now, right?

J: Yes. We were broken up. I mean, I can't remember the name of the little ship I was on, but it doesn't matter. But we were broken up into small groups. --

End of Tape 1, Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: You ended up in Le Havre, France.

J: Le Havre is a port city in France. Sort of a collection point. Put it that way. After the invasion they had built docks, floating docks out into the harbor of Le Havre. I forget what they call those. You read about them in history. They're concrete bunkers that they pulled across and sunk. Or they would sink a ship that was damaged. It's like a harbor. They made a harbor because Le Havre was practically flattened to the land. All you could see was stubs of buildings there.

We landed at Le Havre and then we marched from there to a field near Rouen. I relate it in my diary. I think it was field number J42 or whatever. Just a space with a fence pole and a tag on it saying J42. And it was miserable. It was wet, muddy. We had to pitch our pup tents and we stayed there I think about a week. Then they shipped us, then we got called up and we had a motor march from there to the front lines. That had to be December 7. I think a two day motor march.

I think we got into Saint Vith on the Belgian border on the ninth and then we slept in the woods. Beautiful woods around Belgium. Slept in the woods for a couple nights and then we were told or we were ordered to and did replace the 2nd Infantry Division. Man per man. Gun per gun. In other words, my gun was taken and put into a position where the 2nd Infantry Division's heavy weapons company gun. As a matter of fact, I gave him my new tripod and put my gun on his old tripod and we were in a pit that was covered by logs.

T: So a literal replacement one for one of everything that was there. Duplicate that.

J: Yes. Man for man, gun for gun. Even some of our artillery. Some of their artillery pieces were dug in to the revetments. Some of the 2nd Division guns were so hard to get out that they just left them there. They gave us their guns and they took ours. Unfortunately they were battle-wise, and they took everything including the heat stoves and we ended up with... nothing. As fresh troops, fresh troops always get the tail end of everything.

T: You learn hard lessons, I suppose.

J: You learn hard lessons. Yes.

(1, B, 439)

T: You weren't in that position very many days at all before the Germans launched their major offensive, in December of 1944.

J: I think we were there ...let's see. The battle started on the sixteenth, and we were there about a week. About a week. I forget the day we got there, to tell you the truth. We were just settling in. And there hadn't been any real action. I explain in my diary that, you know, I describe my first night, which has to be horrible for any front line man. You see things moving and you hear sounds that you don't know.

You're not acquainted. But we settled in, and in the first week we had no firefights. Nothing to disturb us. Just did our thing and went back to the mess hall to eat. They had a tent back of the hill. We were on the front slope of a hill facing into Germany. We were just east of the old German Siegfried Line. The West Wall. As a matter of fact, my company commander, it was on the third floor in the ground of a concrete bunker that was part of the German west wall back over the hill from us.

We were in what they called the Schnee Eifel, which means snow mountain. It's like a hogback in Kentucky. You've heard of hogbacks, the mountains. They call them hogbacks. The small mountains in Kentucky, locally they call those hogbacks. That's the way it looked in Germany. It's the most beautiful country that you've ever seen in your life.

T: Almost like low rolling hills, this kind of thing?

J: Yes. Yes. Little mountains. Seven hundred meters to...—I don't know what their elevation is. I've got a good map there too, by the way. Of that area. Even shows the bunkers. But we were put into these bunkers facing the German lines. In front of us, which we couldn't see because we were in the woods... some of our other positions were in the open so to speak. They could see. The position I was in and where part of our regiment was, was on the hillside in a woods facing a valley. The 2nd Infantry Division had cleared the woods ahead of us of all the trees for two or three hundred yards to have a field of fire. And that's all we could see. We couldn't see anything beyond that. But when I went back to report to my company commander, I had a chance to look around when I went through some of these open areas. We were sitting on the edge of a hill facing Germany with a beautiful valley before us. Farming land down there.

T: It sounds very placid and very nice.

J: I'd like to have a cottage there. Beautiful country. So there we were setting and we were on a, as you know, and I haven't related yet, but we were on a twenty-one mile front. A normal division displacement in World War II according to the manual is five miles. A five mile front.

T: So you were covering four times as much space.

(1, B, 500)

J: Four times. Maybe even a little more. So we were spread out. I was the left-most machine gun on the 423rd Regiment. There was one rifleman in a foxhole just to my left. Then there was an open space going down to a valley to the next regiment. I don't know how many meters or yards it was to that next, but every half hour there would be a patrol go from there side and our side back and forth. And that's how we were covered in that particular part of it. The Germans were well acquainted with the territory. They had been there in two wars. And they knew their way. I found out after the war that they had been going through those valleys as far as back to

Saint Vith, which was probably eight miles, maybe eleven miles total. They had been going back on patrols back through there. We didn't see any action. We didn't see any Germans. One day when I went to lunch there were two Germans sitting under a tree being guarded that had been captured. They had been on patrol. That's the only Germans I ever saw before I got captured. Before the day I got into battle.

T: It sounds like it could lull [one] into thinking that the war is kind of an easy thing here. That it's gradually going to move forward and maybe soon it will be over.

J: We had some excitement. We had a .50 caliber machine gun right to my right. To the right of my emplacement. Probably one hundred yards away. One day he opened up with his .50 caliber and we thought something had started, you know. He was just shooting a deer.

T: So things were a little slow.

J: A little slow. Yes. We had no action on our front. We were sitting in a little world of our own on top of a mountain—if you can visualize us. People say how did you ever, how did they ever get around you? I say well, can you visualize a rock out in the middle of a stream? Like a big boulder. You're looking out in the stream. There's water flowing on either side of this big boulder. That was us on this mountain. The Germans just went around us. All they had to do was go around and get behind us. There was open spots. If you look at the map we had miles and miles of open territory between us and the next division. Even the next regiment.

T: When this German attack came, then your position was pretty quickly bypassed and surrounded.

J: We were bypassed. As far as the war was concerned it was hard for us... and you've got to understand in a forest of fir trees—you've got to visualize some beautiful fir trees; great, I've never seen anything like it in my life until I got there. The sounds are muffled. You don't hear anything at night except a few little sounds. People said well there was a battle raging around you. We didn't hear it. We heard some muffled explosions and muffled—they had what they called the *Nebelwerfer*. It's a bunch of rocket tubes that they fire. They call them Screaming Meemies. We heard those once in a while. We didn't know exactly who they were shooting at. They weren't directed at us. We knew that. They apparently just left us up on top of the hill on purpose and surrounded us to cut us off. I think it was on the seventeenth of December. I get called back to my company commander's dugout. He was three stories below the ground and he said, "I think we're going to bring your machine gun back to guard the command post. I'll let you know."

On the eighteenth I was ready to go back down there, but we got word we're going to pull out. So they said the Germans had surrounded us. We were cut off from the rest of the American troops. I don't know exactly how he put the words, but we'd have to make our way back to a certain town. And that certain town turned out to be the town of Schoenberg, which we eventually got near to, but we

were also surrounded. Schoenberg, that's the town in which we were trapped and our commanders gave up on us.

T: At this time how much did you know? Did you know exactly what you told me? Did the company commander tell the people, the men in your unit, this is the situation, or did you just gradually become aware of the situation?

J: Our sergeant, our platoon leader came to us and said that we'd have to pull out. "Put your gun in the Jeep. Take only what you think is necessary and leave your duffel bags down by the kitchen." We had a kitchen. Like a tent. We'd have to pull out. "We think we're surrounded and we've been told we have to turn around and make our way back to—we're going to head back to the west." That's all we knew.

T: It wasn't long before you and many others in your unit were captured by the Germans.

J: We left our positions on the Eiffel on the eighteenth. We made our way back to the positions where we eventually got captured by the night of the eighteenth. In the middle of the night our commander told us where to put our machine guns. We didn't have dugouts. We just put it wherever we could place it. The next morning then, about nine thirty in the morning, you didn't get daylight until about nine o'clock. Then all hell broke loose from firing. The Germans were firing all sorts of artillery into us. I heard mortar shells for ten years after the war. That's how terrific it was. You know, the whistling and whispering noise it makes. We were just blasted all day long. We were under artillery fire or we were under mortar fire.

They placed us in a poor position. With a machine gun you're supposed to be supporting a rifle company. We were in the 3rd Battalion, which is I, K, and L Company. K and L Company were down in the valley below us. We were supposed to give supporting fire over their head if we had to. We were so far back we could not see over their heads. When we finally found out where we were at. The next morning they were being shelled just as badly as us. As a matter of fact, probably more. They had a lot of mortar fire and they were being hit hard. I could hear guys screaming and yelling for medics. They were being pinned down. There was just nothing we could do about it. We were just so overpowered by artillery. The Germans had gotten all the way behind us and had rings of artillery firing into this particular pothole. Like a pothole. My gunner tried to put our gun into position. Get it set up. He got hit with some shrapnel. At the same time I got hit in the Achilles heel area, but didn't realize it until the next day.

(1, B, 609)

T: That's the piece on your heel, right?

J: Yes. It was on my right Achilles tendon. He jammed the gun. The gun was not working. I can't get the cover. The cover won't close. Then he laid down beside me

and he had a leg wound. He had a leg wound at the same time. You know, to this day I can't remember what happened to the rest of the squad.

T: I wanted to ask you, you mentioned artillery and mortar barrage. Describe if you can what it's like to be under artillery fire or mortar fire.

J: Oh, it's horrific. First place, there's what they call a tree burst, when the artillery comes down when it strikes the trees. And we were in a forest. It's very effective as far the Germans were concerned because it showers shrapnel all over the place. The shells would go off above ground in other words. The same thing with mortar shells. Like I told you, I could hear mortar shells, no kidding, for ten years after the war. It's a sound that you never forget. A whispering sound like (*chuu-chuu-chuu-chuu*). You can hear them coming.

T: But you can't get out of the way.

J: You can't get out of the way. We weren't experienced. I laid down beside a tree to protect myself and even then at one point in time there was a piece of shrapnel probably two feet long came whistling through the air and landed within just a few feet of us. I actually reached out and touched it after it cooled off. It was a long sliver of rusty steel about that long. The Germans had 120mm anti-aircraft guns that they were firing. They had brought up in case the Air Force, you know, they needed protection. And they were using them against us. Our captain was nearly decapitated, and died right about thirty yards from me. My gunner was injured. His leg, I didn't realize it, but in prison camp he lost his right leg. He had a gut wound which I didn't know at that time, and had to stop working because of it in 1963. I can't tell you today what happened to the rest of my squad. All I remember of Smitty, that's my gunner, all I remember in this trauma of this battle, all I remember were Smitty and me; I don't know where the rest of the squad was.

T: The circle of awareness becomes quite small, in other words.

J: Yes.

T: You're aware of yourself.

J: Yes.

T: What goes through your mind when you're laying there?

J: You're just trying to protect yourself and you look up and, as I told you, and I related in my diary, I watched, I heard shells coming in. I happened to be looking up. There was a big tree here and I was laying beside it, but I could see down the line, so to speak, around the slope of the hill. There were shells bursting about two hundred yards south of me to my left. I saw a body fly up in the tree. I didn't see it come down. It flew up into a tree. You heard guys screaming for medics down in the field

in front of us. And the medics weren't too active either, because they were being shot.

T: If they got up the artillery and mortars would get them too.

J: We were under an artillery barrage all day long. I didn't know it at the time, but just about thirty or forty yards away from me my company commander had died instantly on the first barrage. Tragically had his head nearly cut off. The first sergeant and those guys were back there. They were cowering down into their foxholes just like we were. So we really didn't have any direction or control. We didn't have any place to go because it was just too much. Just overpowering.

So about four thirty there was sort of a lull. There were some lulls during the day. But then there would be a little mortar fire and then pretty soon there would come some more artillery. No directions. Nobody giving any directions. We were just stuck on this hill. I would say from here across the street... what would that be? One hundred fifty, two hundred yards. There was an American officer showed up on the top of a little knoll with a German beside him. And they had a white flag. And he was motioning to us, we're giving up. We were told to destroy our guns, and then some Germans started coming through the woods with rifles and we were standing there with our hands behind our head.

(1, B, 671)

T: Let me ask you for your thoughts and feelings at that moment when you realized that these Germans were going to take you prisoner. What went through your mind then?

J: I can't remember exactly [what was going through my mind]. You were stunned. We were in shock. And it was obvious I was in shock later on when I found out I had been hit but didn't realize it. Not badly but close enough. There had been a piece of shrapnel went right around my boot right behind my Achilles tendon on my right leg. Like it spun around. It ripped my galoshes. There was a rip around the back of the galoshes that I didn't know was there. I never slept that night. I was—I'm kind of going ahead a little bit. But I finally ended up in a churchyard with my back against a stone wall, as a prisoner of war. Never slept. Just sat there all night long.

Six thirty in the morning they pulled us out to take us someplace else, and as we walked along the road, we went through this little town where there had been a terrific fight. There were bodies all over the place. German and American. After we walked through that town, there were some farmers along the road and the guard stopped us and made me take off my galoshes and give them to the farmer. That's when I noticed my galoshes had been ripped across the back. My combat boot had been cut all the way through to my Achilles tendon. Just above it. Right in here. It was at the tendon. But it hadn't penetrated. Thank God. I wouldn't have been able to walk. So that's when I first noticed that I had been hit.

T: You had combat boots and galoshes over the top of that?

J: Yes. The galoshes were taken away. So I was in my combat boots. That's what I had when I was liberated.

T: The same pair of boots.

J: Except they were like a pair of galoshes on my feet. I had lost so much weight they were flapping around.

T: These farmers. That sounds like a curious moment. You've got guards and these POWs and a bunch of civilians there? Is that...

J: Yes. As you go in and out of these villages there are farmers around. They were just standing there watching what was happening. They were a curious crowd. Evidently this guard, maybe the farmer even, pointed at the galoshes. The Germans didn't have any. They were without many things too.

(1, B, 699)

T: Sure. By 1944 for sure.

J: By 1944. He might have pointed at me and said, I want those galoshes. I didn't see that. All I saw was the German guard point to my feet and said, "Take them off." I don't remember how he related it, but I knew what he wanted.

T: You mentioned more than one village. It sounds like they [these farmers] were curious, but not hostile or aggressive. Is that what you are describing?

J: They didn't have to be. We were under guard anyhow. They didn't come up and slap us or spit on us or anything like that. That happened in Koblenz. In Germany, you have to remember in Germany, the people in the big cities were having horrible times. The farmers weren't having that hard of a time. They were under the German government. They had to account for all the food they produced. They had to account for every cow, every egg that they had. But you know how people are, and how farmers can be. I don't mean farmers, but you know that people can, they can make little rules of their own.

T: You squirrel things away?

J: They squirrel things away. Yes. So the farmers, like Margot, my wife was a German war orphan, she says the farmers were the only people who had food. So there I was, and the farmer wanted my galoshes. They got a pair of galoshes that were ripped in the back. Maybe he could vulcanize them or something. He had them. I didn't have them.

T: Your diary describes how you, over the first couple of days, were marched to Koblenz, which is due east of where you were captured.

J: We were captured on the German-Belgian border. We were marched through Prüm, which is the first big-size town to the east of it. And the next town was a little town named Gerolstein. It's a nice size town. I've been back there. But they had a railroad marshalling yard. Railroad yards. Our first group of prisoners who had gotten there before I did had pretty well filled up the town and filled up any available space, so my group walked through this town of Gerolstein, which was east of Prüm... Would you like to see that on a map?

T: Actually I looked at the map that you gave me, and I know the geography anyway.

J: I've got a beautiful map of the area. But we walked through Gerolstein to a town that I wrote in my diary as Dockweiler-Dreis. Somebody told me that meant three little towns or something. Dreis meaning three [in German]. *Eins, zwei, drei* [German: one, two, three]. In that town was a German Panzer camp. A training camp of Panzer divisions. Of course they weren't occupying it, because they were east of us. They were west of us. They put us in the barracks there. This was just prior to Christmas. I can't remember the date. I would have to look at my date when we got there. We stayed there I think two nights or three nights.

Christmas Day then they took my group that I was in and put us on the road, and we marched through Mainz, which is a nice size town just east of us. Bombed off the map. I remember seeing that. I've got pictures of it here. We were walking. I think only twice during my prison experience did we have to sleep outside in the snow; the rest of the time wasn't in good quarters, but they put us in old brick factories, etc. They put us in various types of old buildings. But we walked—I know how much a kilometer is but my figuring is done in miles—we walked from the front to the first prison camp. Well, first let me explain. We walked through Mainz. I can't remember where we might have stayed, how many days that took right now. I'd have to look at my log. But we ended up in Koblenz.

In Koblenz they put us into... There was a training camp, officers training camp. It's still there according to what somebody told me but I couldn't find it. We didn't have the time when I went over there. There were three three-story buildings in that camp. Like in a dormitory style fashion, with a warehouse across the street. They tell me that was a German officers training camp. School or training camp. They put us in a three-story building. I ended up on the third floor. So we were put there that night. We slept. The next day at two thirty in the afternoon the American bombers came over and there was a railroad yard near us and they were bombing the railroad yard. But when the sirens went off... As a matter of fact, in my room—these rooms were small rooms, like for two officers in a room, with a study desk. That type of a thing. It was like a school. Like a dormitory. I could look out the third story window, slightly elevated, slightly up, and there was a German anti-aircraft position up on top of the hill. I could see the guys with their coal shovel helmets—the troops.

When the bombings came, the first day they let us go to the basement. That was at two thirty in the afternoon. We went back up into our rooms. There were bomb hits all around us. The buildings were shaking. There were some windows out that day. The next day at two thirty, here come the American bombers again bombing the railroad. There were fifteen bomb craters around these three barracks when it was all said and done. We could see the ack ack [anti-aircraft] gun the Germans were firing, and the second day they wouldn't let us go to the basement. So we were trapped in the room. What we did, we had a couple of old German Army blankets given to us at Dockweiler while we were in this camp. We covered ourselves with the blankets.

On the second day of the bombing at Koblenz, our higher non-coms, our first sergeants and master sergeants, went to the German guards and said, "You've got to get us out of here, because we're in an area where it's being bombed."

End Tape 1, Side B. Tape 2, Side A begins at counter 000.

J: We were at Koblenz and our higher non-coms talked with the guards and said, "You've got to get us out of here." They said, "Okay, but you have to march all night." Four thirty in the afternoon we left Koblenz and marched to Stalag 12-A, at Limburg, Germany. It was an all night march. Dark as could be. We crossed the Rhine on a wooden bridge at Koblenz and we made it to the camp. I've said in some of my stories about this, that we never went into the camp. My memory doesn't tell me we went into the camp but my buddies tell me we did go into the camp at 12-A Limburg, and we that were there maybe for a day or two. I remember some time in my history of that, of sleeping in like circus tents. Because they were so overloaded, they put up like circus tents. Put some straw on the ground. That might have been where that was at. Under any circumstances, let's say we stayed there a couple of days. They put us on boxcars one night and shipped us eighty miles east of Dresden.

We left Limburg and we spent seven days in a boxcar. We never got out. Period. They shoved food, they shoved a piece of bread or something, about three times, and a little bucket of water. We had sixty men in the boxcar, and these were the forty and eight style. The small boxcars. Forty men or eight horses. We never got out. The doors were not unlocked. For a toilet we had a five gallon lard can. And there were sixty men in there. You could not lay down all at once. Some people would have to lay down and others stand up. It was a horrible ride. We were strafed once, but we were put on sidings several times because of the bad railroads. There was one period where we were strafed, and the soldiers in the boxcars ahead of us, they got out in the snow and waved at the American planes, so the planes went away. I understand there were some people killed on the train, but I have no knowledge of any in my car.

(2, A, 52)

T: You've been captured by the Germans for several days now. I'm wondering, I'm trying to project, in this situation how much were you afraid? Is fear part of what's going on here?

J: No. I don't remember being afraid. I think you're just numb. I think, you know, psychologically, I think you're just beaten down. You've given up. The bombing raids—even when we were bombed I don't remember being totally afraid. Except, well, yes, you duck back in a corner with a blanket over your head or something like that. I don't remember feeling the sense of fear, like total fear, even in the boxcars. You were just... I don't know, I think your mind blocks; I don't think you're in a real world when you're in that type of a situation. I think there's something about the mind that sort of blocks some of the senses that you have. It's hard to remember exactly. You ask if I know about fear. I think there was fear there, but I probably didn't recognize it in the sense... in the way of a description.

T: Being on this train for days and days...

J: It was nearly a week.

T: How did you pass the time? I mean, it's a lot of time.

J: That's a good question. You just pass it. I mean, as I said, I think you're in a state of shock.

T: Were people as you remember quiet, talking, yelling, sleeping?

J: They were just numb. You were like you were numb. You didn't talk much. If you had a buddy next to you, you might be talking to him.

T: Did you have a buddy with you at this time?

J: Not at that particular time. My buddy... we'll catch up to that—it was when I was in the first camp. I don't remember anybody being close to me while I was in the boxcar. But my staff sergeant who was my section leader ended up being my buddy on the march. On the big long march coming back. But you know, I have a hard time remembering him from the time we got captured until we got to Görlitz, which is east of Dresden. That's when he and I were bunk buddies. He might have been a bunk buddy of mine when I was in Stalag IV-B at Mühlberg, but I cannot remember that part. We were at Mühlberg and then overnight they shipped us down to Görlitz on a train. We made a quick trip. There wasn't any sidings. There wasn't any bombings. We went through, as I understand it, through Dresden and then went east. I've always said it's seventy or eighty miles east of Dresden.

(2, A, 106)

T: It is approximately. Yes. Now you were at Mühlberg, Stalag IV-B, for five or six days. What are your recollections of that first camp that you were in?

J: That's where I spent my twentieth birthday (*chuckles*). My recollections of that camp? There were people milling about in the barracks. I can't think of anything that was real remarkable other than being in a prison camp. [We were] in barracks. We'd get a little warm tea in the morning, or so-called coffee. It was ersatz coffee. And then at night we were supposed to get a meal, which happened to be soup. You know, it was not very good, like water. Let's put it that way. But it was something that was warm, and you put it in a cup and drank it actually, is what it amounted to.

T: Yes. The people in this camp, mostly Americans?

J: The group I was with were Americans. It's IV-B. I don't remember other nationalities in IV-B. Because maybe I was secluded in a spot where there were all Americans. I remember later on, at Stalag VIII-A at Görlitz, there were about seven nationalities there. Serbians, French...

T: I see. So a real mix at that point.

J: It was a real mix.

T: When you were in Mühlberg or even before—you didn't get there until January 7—was there any kind of interrogation or questioning that you underwent?

J: Never got questioned. Only later on. One time at Görlitz. The barracks were a huge barracks. There were two hundred fifty men in each barracks. The barracks were joined by a center wall.

At one point in time at Görlitz they made us all get at one end of the barracks and then go through a door, and they searched us. I had to open my pocketbook and show them whatever I had in my pockets and that type of thing. I don't even know what the purpose of the... it wasn't an interrogation. I never got interrogated. I talked to a pair of buddies of mine who got interrogated, and one of them told me they knew what high school he went to. They knew when he graduated. They had information. Now in my mind I find that hard to believe, although it came from a person who I believe. What would the German interrogator... where would he have records of what... for instance, where you went to high school?

T: Yes. It's a very strange piece of information.

J: Yes. What town he came from.

T: Yes. Now when you were searched, were you searched right when you were captured by the Germans?

J: I was patted down, yes. You held your hands up and somebody went over your body. That was about it.

T: Because you kept and I've seen, you've shown me, the little diary that you kept. Basically a small...

J: That was later on. I got that paper. There was an Englishman gave me part of a notebook, which I just showed you a few minutes ago.

T: Right. Correct. And you had that while you were at Görlitz, right?

J: Yes.

T: How easy was it to keep a written record? This is the kind of the thing that the camp guards or authorities wouldn't want people to have.

J: There were so many of us I think. I had no trouble. I kept it next to my body. Nobody ever frisked me after that. Put it that way.

T: You kept this, you had this diary. What made you decide to write things down?

J: I don't know exactly. Except it seemed like I wanted to keep track of the towns we were walking through.

T: Is that the first thing you started to record?

J: Yes.

T: What else did you record? It's a small space. It isn't many pages at all. What kind of things...

J: It was mostly the towns. I would have to look at it. I didn't really make a detailed diary. I did sit down after I got back home and recalled. It's easy at that point in time to do some recalling of what happened. That's how I actually built up the diary. Later on I embellished it a little with some historical parts that became known. For instance, some of the details of the Duderstadt Brick Factory and different things that I was in. Mostly when I first wrote into it, it was keeping track of the towns. But I notice... I'm recalling my own memory now that I look at it here today. I had written, I had made several notes about what we were doing. But at that time the memory was still pretty sharp from the walk, from the march. You can remember a lot of details.

T: Let me ask you about the conditions at Stalag VIII-A in Görlitz, where you spent a month. Can you talk about that?

J: That was just a huge, typical, what I would call a typical, German prison camp. Big wooden barracks. As I just said, the barracks we were in held two hundred fifty men in each section, and there probably wasn't that many in there normally. But everything was packed at that time. There were a lot of prisoners being taken.

There were seven nationalities as I remember it. I don't know if I can repeat them off the top of my head now, but there were English and Serbians and French.

It was midwinter. It was colder than the devil. Bare. Prison camps usually are just bare dirt. There's no grass around the buildings. We were allowed to get outside and walk around if we wanted to. But it was like you going out in the middle of the winter here and walking around in a field. There was nothing but bare gravel. But just to get out of the barracks. I remember getting out and walking around once in a while. Thinking about: what am I doing here?

T: Did it cross your mind finally, when the movement had stopped for a few weeks and you were able think about your situation really, about yourself and about really where you were and what had happened?

J: Yes. I don't remember the thoughts exactly, but... you're thinking. About that time you're really getting down mentally. Wondering what's going to happen. Wonder if you're going to get back to home. That type of a thing.

T: When you worried or wondered like that, was it more wondering what the Germans would do to you perhaps, or more worrying about malnutrition and disease?

J: I think it was worrying about whether you were going to make it or not.

The Germans never did show any signs of brutality to our group that I know about. The only answer that I can speak of personally was when they took my boots off and gave them to a farmer. But the rest of the time we were just like... we were a group. Of course they probably had a hard time handling because there were so many of us. But we were just in a group that was slogging along, slogging along, going back into Germany. I cannot remember any one particular prisoner being mistreated or beaten up or anything like that.

T: And this is in Görlitz as well? You don't recall any kind of...

J: No. No.

T: Okay.

J: It was at Görlitz that I developed... I was bleeding out of the mouth. I had trench mouth and didn't know it. They sent me to the French doctor. I went in to the French doctor's room and he had nothing in there. They had no medicine. He had a little white pill he gave me and said, try this. I don't even know what it was. That was the only medical attention that I had.

I had some buddies. One who had to be aspirated. As I learned later, in the 1980s, he had fluid on the lungs. And a French-Jewish doctor was the doctor in the came who aspirated him. But they put him then on a boxcar and shipped him to another camp. As we walked the sick people, so-called sick people, were put on a boxcar. They eventually ended up at Stalag XI, which was—I have to look on the

map to tell you the name of it—which was north of where we really got captured. Up in that area.

T: More in western Germany then.

J: Yes. They ended up way over to another camp. We were on the road then. They took us out on Valentine's Day and said the Russians were coming. Because they were twenty or thirty kilometers away.

(2, A, 235)

T: They were coming.

J: Yes.

T: You mentioned a number of different nationalities at this camp. Did POWs of different nationalities mix with each other or largely keep to themselves?

J: No. They kept to themselves. We were in different barracks. But I remember going through the Serbians' barracks, which were probably next to us. It was warm in there. They had been there for a long time. They were more acclimated. They seemed to have some food. As a matter of fact I think they gave us some food. I remember the distinct smells. You know, different than what we as Americans are used to as far as cooking or that type. That was like an in and out trip. Walking through the barracks. I don't even know whether I was supposed to have been over there, but I was. They weren't in a separate compound. Some of the Polish, some of the prisoners, were in separate compounds. But we were in a section where there was us in a few barracks plus there must have been some Serbians alongside of us and we were able to walk around.

T: I talked to another POW of the 106th who was at Görlitz and also remembers these Serbian barracks. He spoke of an incident whereby the Serbs, by his memory, had made available to the Americans some food.

J: I understand that myself.

T: And he also went on to say that he recalls that some American POWs had, it was understood, pilfered or stolen some things from the Serbian barracks and that the Serbs demanded that these people be punished and that the Americans were allowed how to punish their own people. Do you recall that incident, Mr. Kline?

J: No. I do not. I was not aware of that.

T: There were a lot of people there.

J: I've heard of incidents like this, but I personally was not aware at that time.

T: One thing you do mention in your diary here. Here you're talking and it's 2 March 1945, so after you have left Görlitz. You say, "The food supply is getting sparse. It's surprising how a man will act if he's hungry. George has a knack for begging and finding food. Probably because he's so small and looks so feeble. I'm sure I also look awful, but he seems to get more handouts. And then the other night George had a loaf of bread and a can of salt in a burlap bag under his head. The next morning after awakening the bread was gone. The other prisoners would cut your throat for something to eat. Like a bunch of starved rats. This is the great American soldier. Nothing but a bunch of sneaky thieves. Your own buddy would turn you in to a guard if it would bring food as a reward." Could you talk about that? In a sense, we do have this image of the group of people standing together, of the American fighting man. That picture that you paint there is a very different one.

(2, A, 275)

J: I think there's times even with the great American fighting man that it gets that way. We were in bad shape at that time. You were looking for anything you could eat. People were picking up stuff. I think there is a point where your spirit breaks down and you do just about anything to get something to eat. That's about all I can explain it. But that did happen. It did happen.

T: Does this suggest that the morale among the people, either at Görlitz or on this march after that, was suffering?

J: I think our morale was suffering greatly. I don't know... about what time was that?

T: March 2.

J: We left there...

T: That's two weeks after you left Görlitz.

J: That's only two weeks after we left. Yes.

T: Would you say morale was suffering or was already a problem at places like Görlitz?

J: I'll put it this way. You kept in groups of two, three or four people. You didn't give a hoot about what was happening to anybody else. That group of yours, and my group was only George and I.

T: So a group of two.

J: It's like the buddy system, is what it is. It turns out to be the buddy system. He and I, as you know later on, I talk about going on a burial detail. But there would be

groups. Three or four buddies together, and if they stole food or found some food they shared it between those three or four. They wouldn't share it with anybody else. That's the way it gets to be. The lone guy is the way I understand it.

I was told after the war, one of our staff sergeants crawled over into the corner of the barracks—he was a loner—the night before the camp was liberated and died. I asked my buddies. I said, “Did he mingle with anybody?” They said no. He was always alone. He was a loner. And he just finally gave up and crawled over in the corner of the barracks and he was dead the day of liberation.

T: So by yourself people would have had a rough time. You needed to have a friend.

J: I think so. Yes. If I had any lesson to learn from my experience I would tell, if I was teaching an Army squad what to do in a situation like this, I would say get next to somebody. Stay with them. Be buddies. Have a buddy system. Just like when you're swimming in a swimming pool.

T: As people kind of kept in closed groups, two, three, four, whatever the number was, was there a sense of, if you felt something had been taken or you had been wronged, was there retribution from one group on another?

J: I didn't see anything.

T: So you were looking out for yourself, but it wasn't a case of aggressive protection or...

J: I can't recall. I don't think I mentioned it. I don't think I said it in my diary either. Those memories slip a little. But I cannot recall seeing a fight for instance, between two groups. The one incident I do talk about in the way of food was when George and I caught a pigeon at Duderstadt, in the Brick Factory. When we came down the next morning somebody, one of our guys, turned us in to the German guards. Told that we had stolen German food. Because in Germany every piece of livestock is owned by the Germans. That morning when we fell out to start our march to go further on, George and I were called up before a German officer and a sergeant. He was accusing us of stealing German property. And all we stole, we caught a pigeon and cooked it. And that's all we stole. And I kept trying to tell them. I didn't know the German word for pigeon. I kept saying “pflugel” or something like that which I thought meant avion or something like that. Finally he stomped away in disgust and we went on our march. But I thought George and I were in deep trouble at that particular point in time. Margot told me later on in life that every piece of livestock in Germany is registered, and you don't get rid of it without the German government knowing about it. It's all German property. So maybe that was the theory then. Who was the guy that turned us in? I don't know. He was jealous because we cooked a pigeon. And he didn't get any of it.

(2, A, 325)

T: I'm wondering if keeping order, or some sense of order, among a lot of enlisted POWs at Görlitz or on this walk... how was that done? I mean from the Americans themselves.

J: You mean the pecking order? In this group we were all non-coms. That would be sergeant up to first sergeant. Corporals down, according to the Geneva Conference, were put in other camps. Non-coms, that's from buck sergeant up to top sergeant, were kept in A camps, like IX-A. You had IX-B, which was Bad Orb. That was privates, PFCs and corporals. You had IX-A at Ziegenhain, which was quite a few miles away. Those were non-commissioned officers.

From Stalag IX-B, where the first big group of ours was sent, there was nearly four thousand 106th prisoners. They took 1236 or something like that, non-commissioned officers, out and shipped them to Ziegenhain, Stalag IX-A. They had the A and B system. The Bs were the lower ranked, privates up to corporal. Including corporal. Sergeant up were sent to A camps.

T: And officers of course went to their own camps as well.

J: And the officers went to the Oflags. That was when the Geneva Conference... back when those rules were written. Anybody below a corporal, including the corporal, could be worked as long as it wasn't in so-called war work. But that was violated also.

T: I see. That's the difference between A and B camps.

J: Yes. Stammlager A and Stammlager B.

T: You spent many weeks on a long march from Görlitz; westward to central Germany and then north.

J: South and west. North and west. Yes.

T: And you ended up at Helmstedt, which is right about...

J: We went south, yes, we went southwest, down to Jena, and Gotha. I can't remember where we made the turn and slightly northwest. Then straight up from Duderstadt straight up to Braunschweig. And at Braunschweig we were in an old Russian camp there for a few days, which was a real hellhole. It was so filthy.

Then we started walking toward the Elbe [River], to the east. From Braunschweig to Königshutter. At Königshutter the guards wanted to give us up, let us go back to our troops. And the mayor, the Burgermeister there, wouldn't let him. So they kept us on the road. I reached a point where I could not walk. So they threw me in a sick wagon. I ended up in an infirmary at Helmstedt.

T: Where you were liberated.

J: Yes. I was there just overnight.

T: These many weeks marching, I'm wondering if you can talk about the conditions on the march and perhaps what was the most difficult part of that for you.

J: You know, I think that you just slogged along. Now people have asked me this. How did you feel? You know, I think our feelings, I think we were numb. We just put our head down and put our foot, one foot in front of the other and just kept moving along. People said, how did you walk so far? I said, you just do it. You have to. They gave us a couple of old Army blankets. Pull them over your head and try to keep warm. Just slog along. When you say, what are my thoughts? You're just trudging. You don't know what's going to happen next. There would be a bombing raid up ahead, so they'll stop you. Then you go off into the woods or go off into the grass. Most of the time pull your pants—you probably don't have to record all this, do you?

T: Right. Go ahead.

J: Pull your pants down and squirt. You know, we all had diarrhea at that time. Dysentery. I remember spending one bombing raid on my haunches. The whole bombing raid. Pulled my pants up and got back on the road and continued with the crowd.

T: With a diarrhea or dysentery, it must have made your daily existence pretty miserable.

J: It was. When you had to go, you had to go. No matter what you had to do.

T: Could you step out of line to go to the bathroom?

J: Yes. They would let you step out. I can't remember (*chuckles*). I don't think I ever filled my pants. Let's put it that way. I might have. A little bit.

T: Particularly when you have diarrhea like that.

J: It's just water coming out of you. But I don't know where it comes from. You know what I mean?

T: Yes. Because you're not eating and drinking very much.

J: I'm not drinking that much water either.

T: Yes. What kind of food and fluids were available to you?

J: Fluids? I don't remember much of anything but about once every, I don't know if it was every two days or every three days, they would have a soup wagon. And you

would go by and whatever thing you had to put some soup in, tin can or some guys still had their helmet. I didn't. I don't know what happened to my helmet. You'd get a dipper of soup.

End of Tape 2, Side A. Side B begins at counter 384.

T: Did you have to supply your own container to eat in? I mean, did you have to have your own...

J: You had to have something. Yes.

T: What did you use?

J: I can't remember. I don't know if it was the canteen cup. World War II canteens had a cup that the canteen set into, and then you used that cup as a soup ladle.

T: You may have had that. You're not sure.

J: I'm not sure. Really I'm not sure.

T: What was the most difficult part of that, those weeks of marching for you?

J: It's hard to say. Once you get into that mode, you're just putting your head down and just keeping going. You know you have to keep going because you figure if you drop along the road you're not going to live. You just keep trudging, trudging. I think your mind builds a block. I think at that point in time our mind was just numb. Hopefully we wouldn't get bombed or strafed. Just hoping that the next town they might give us some more food. Then getting up the next morning and say, well, we have to go to the next town. It was just automatic. We must have built into us a survival situation where the mind sort of goes dull but it says to you, you gotta stay alive. You gotta stay alive. So you just keep going, and you just keep going. That's the only answer that I can give to that, because that was a big, long march.

T: It was hundreds of miles, right? Four hundred some miles.

J: I figure it's four hundred miles. I'm not talking kilometers. I figured it out after the war. I kept track of the towns and then I figured out the kilometers. It had to be about four hundred miles from Görlitz to where we were liberated. And just before we were liberated, I couldn't walk any longer and they put me on the *Krankenwagen*. We ended up in an infirmary at an ammunition plant.

T: It sounds like it was a close call for you. That you made it.

J: Margot and I talk about it often. I said, "If the war had lasted two more weeks, I think I would have been dead."

T: Because your condition had steadily weakened.

J: I couldn't walk. They had to carry me into the infirmary.

T: You were liberated from this infirmary in the city of Helmstedt.

J: On the outskirts. I understand it to be the outskirts.

T: Right. Outskirts of town. 13 April 1945. What do you remember about that day? And what went through your mind?

(2, B, 438)

J: That day? As I remember, and I may have the number wrong, I think there were about thirty-two of us in this group.

T: In this infirmary.

J: Yes. We were separated from the main column right after we got out of Königshutter. Because I couldn't walk anymore they threw me on a wagon and there were some other sick people. There was thirty-two of us in this so-called sick group that went on a separate route of its own. I learned later from some guys that I ran across at a reunion, that the main column went another road up to a different spot. We went straight east from Königshutter and ended up at Helmstedt. As I recall it was only two days, two days before we got to Helmstedt, that I was so ill I couldn't walk. George and I had rolled off into a ditch just before that. There was a big deep ditch. I don't know why we did it. He said later on in life after I met him, after many, many years, he said I don't know why we even tried that. We rolled down the ditch into a hole. I guess we were thinking about escaping and we could barely walk. So I don't know. Our minds must have been something else at that time.

T: They must have been.

J: Yes.

T: What can you say about, up to this point, the treatment by the Germans on this march? There were guards with you, I take it.

J: We had German guards. They were old guards. They had rifles. I don't even know if the rifles would have fired. One of the guards I remember so distinctly gave George and I half of his sandwich one day. His rifle was so rusty. I don't know if he could even have opened up the bolt. He was one of these with the little red, they had the little red triangle on their coat lapel, the color which meant they were on the Eastern Front. He had one of the winter coats on. It came down about their ankles.

He looked like an old Polish German. Probably of Polish German descent. His rifle was slung across his back and I don't know if he could have even fired the thing.

T: You're not describing mean, angry Germans who abused prisoners.

J: No. No. Not at all. I never saw one bit of abuse. I've heard of some little incidents. But nothing rash. I don't remember any German guard beating up on any American prisoner in my particular vicinity.

T: And you were at several different facilities, including this march.

J: Yes. Not on the front. On the front I heard stories of guys being slapped. But then you have to understand the psychology of being on the front. I mean, there's a battle that just went on. And who knows? Maybe the German guard's buddy had just been killed or something like that. You don't know.

T: That wasn't your experience when you were captured though. You didn't even see that at that time.

J: No. No. I can hardly remember what the guards looked like when we were captured. They must have been front line people. But I think they took us to a point... and probably, when they dropped us off at this one camp where I told you about, I think maybe then some other types of guards took over.

(2, B, 500)

T: They weren't necessarily front line troops.

J: Yes. Yes. Particularly coming out of Görlitz, from Görlitz coming to the east or the west, those were older. I know they were old German Polish guards who had probably been in the front for part of the war and were just old—to us, old. I've heard of some slapping around and stuff on the front lines, but after that there wasn't. It isn't like that. We always thanked God we weren't Japanese prisoners. Let's put it that way.

T: It's a very different experience.

J: Yes.

T: The day when you were liberated at Helmstedt, what kind of feelings or emotions went through your mind when you realized this is over.

J: We heard that there were American troops nearby but we didn't know yet whether there were. So we woke up in the morning of April 13, which happened to be Friday, April 13. I didn't pay much attention to what day it was then, but that's what day it was. We woke up and we were in this infirmary and we were just laying

on the floor. Most of us were sick. The doctor in there had told us he didn't have any medicine. He didn't have any bandages. It was bare bones. It was like being in the basement without any shelves in it. In the door, about ten thirty in the morning, walks an artillery captain, and he had a box of Army D bars. In World War II we had the D bar ration. It was a huge chunk of chocolate and paraffin, a mixture.

T: It must have been hard as a rock.

J: Yes. It's harder than any Hershey bar you ever ate. What it was designed for was World War I. They would take their skilly cups, so-called little cup, and they would take their bayonet and slice this chocolate up into the cup to make a drink out of. So called D bar. What D meant, I don't know.

T: You could eat these things too, I guess.

J: I'm sure. Eat it like chocolate. You about break your teeth but at that time we didn't care; a piece of chocolate was like having dessert. It was great.

T: So here this captain walks through the door.

J: The captain walks through the door and he said, "I can't stick around very long. My artillery has been moving about sixty miles a day." I don't think it was that many miles a day, but he was saying it. He was an artillery captain. In charge of an artillery battalion most likely. He said, "They told me there were some prisoners here. Here's a box full of chocolate bars. I'll see you later. I'm going to send some ambulances up to get you." In fact it wasn't the ambulances that got us that day. Some trucks came out and took us to the general hospital in downtown Helmstedt. There were two large general hospitals in Helmstedt.

T: German facilities.

J: Yes. It was an open city. Not to be bombed. But they had an ammunition plant on the outside of town. On the edge of town. That's where we were. In the ammunition plant infirmary. It was a [I.G.] Farben Industries plant. So we were in a Farben Industries so-called health center. What would you call it? A sick bay.

T: Clinic or something?

J: Clinic. Yes. Like I said, I think it was thirty-two p.m. I think I related that to you. And half a dozen Englishmen that were with us. One of the Englishmen that I was with, liberated with, I kept track of his name and I wrote, after the war I wrote his mother. I wrote the address. Come to find out he died within that one year of meningitis. Which means I was exposed to meningitis. Right? He was a prisoner out of Crete. He had been a prisoner for four years. I wrote back and he lived in the town where Shakespeare was. Stratford [on Avon, England]. I've got the letter right

here if you want to see it. His mother said, "I regret to tell you that my son died one year after he got back, from meningitis."

T: Would you describe yourself as relieved or angry that day? How does a person sort of process the fact that this POW experience is over and that you might actually see the USA again?

J: How do you feel? *(pauses three seconds)* Just completely amazed. I was laying there. They took me out of the evacuation camp. Oh, we went to the hospital first. They took us to the hospital. I can't remember the exact days we were there. Two maybe. I never got out of bed. I was bedridden. George told me that I looked like I was dead. They gave us some food there.

T: Being cared for by Americans or Germans now?

J: By Germans. In a German general hospital. It was a big hospital. Like I was up on the third floor, I think. But there were Germans walking around. I saw one German with two tubes out of his neck down to his chest. He had probably had a throat injury. You saw some people in bad shape in the hospital. We were in bad shape too. There was a tank repair battalion that came by the first day we were there. The second day we were there they brought us some bread, Army bread, and some eggs. Those yellow whipped up eggs.

T: The powdered stuff.

J: Manna from heaven. It was great!

T: After what you'd had, it must have been like holy manna from heaven. My goodness!

J: Yes. They said there would be some ambulances come up to get you, and I think it was the next morning. I'd have to look at my diary. Dates are escaping me now a little bit. There was a string of ambulances came up. It was quite a string. There must have been more guys around there than what I thought there was. They hauled us back to an evacuation hospital. They call it a MASH hospital now, right?

T: Yes. M for mobile.

J: Mobile. Yes. So they hauled us back to an evac hospital and that was my first treatment by Americans. When I arrived at the hospital they put me in a tent and told me to take off all my clothes and throw them into the fire.

T: Those were the ones you'd been captured in, right?

(2, B, 599)

J: Yes. Yes. I had no socks. No gloves. My boots were on my feet like a pair of galoshes at that time because I had lost fifty pounds. So they put me in an evacuation hospital. In the evacuation hospital they put me in a little canvas cot. There was a staff sergeant or a sergeant, tank sergeant, beside me. He had tonsillitis. I was a POW. They would bring me a glass nearly this full of pills, about three times a day, to stop the diarrhea. Then they would bring a tray of food for me and him. He had tonsillitis, so when the nurse left the ward I had finished my tray already, this sergeant felt so sorry for me he would pass me his tray and I would pass him my empty tray.

T: Let me ask you. Was eating a problem? That is, keeping food down right away for you?

J: I don't remember throwing up or having any problem keeping the food down. I think I still had the diarrhea a little bit. They were feeding me something to stop the diarrhea.

T: But you were able to eat.

J: Yes. I was able to eat.

T: Were you debriefed at all by American officials about your time in the camps or on that walk?

J: No. No.

T: Nobody stopped to ask you questions about stuff.

J: No. I got a slip of paper one time said I wasn't supposed to talk about anything secret or anything. We signed off. Some information. Some piece of paper. I think I've got that in my diary someplace.

T: You weren't supposed to talk about what you'd been through?

J: You're not supposed to talk about how you might have tried to escape in the prisoner of war situation. But we didn't have that information to give. You know what I mean? It isn't like we were in the Great Escape [at Stalag Luft III], and dug a tunnel under the camp.

T: So your experience it would have been... You didn't have the opportunity or the strength to even think about digging.

J: Somebody said, "Why didn't you try to escape?" And I said, "Okay, I'm going to take you and place you blindfolded out in the middle of Germany on a road in the cold weather and then ask you, why don't you try to escape?" I said, we had no place to go. Where would we go? We didn't even know what town we were in. We don't

know anything about that much about the geography of Germany to know if it's fifteen miles down to the next town and that type of thing. You're better off staying in your group.

T: That's interesting, because one of the myths is that prisoners should always try to escape. Really if you don't speak the language, and don't know where you are, and you're weak and tired anyway...

J: Yes. Anybody that sees you is going to recognize you as an American soldier trying to escape.

T: Maybe back where you were and who knows what will happen to you.

J: Yes. Those thoughts didn't really come across your mind. The opportunities were just not there. Sure, [on the long march] we could have sneaked off maybe a couple of nights. Sometimes there were dark nights. When we rolled over in the ditch I think we had the grand idea that maybe we could stay there. American troops were coming up behind. Thank God we didn't stay there.

T: Did you get up of your own volition and go back to the group then, or did some Germans find you?

J: No. What happened was, we dropped out and rolled down into a big deep ditch. Our guard right with us didn't see us, but the guard with the group right behind us saw us. So he comes up and, "Heraus." Get out of the ditch. And we were so weak we could hardly crawl up the bank and when I got up, when we got up to the top, he swung and hit me across the back with what looked like a club. It looked like a club coming off of an axe handle like. That's what he was carrying. That was the end of it. He just cursed us and told us to get in line and go. And it was not too long after that that I got so weak I couldn't walk. I think that was the same day.

T: You were in bad shape anyway.

J: Bad shape. It could have been mental. I don't know what we were thinking when we rolled down in that ditch.

T: I wonder if you were thinking clearly at that point. I mean, it sounds like you might not have been.

J: I don't think so. I don't think my mind was... I think we were out of it.

T: You survived.

J: Yes.

T: Like you say, it may have been close. Two more weeks and you might not have.

J: I have no doubt about it in my own mind. I don't know what the body can stand, but I got to where I couldn't walk.

T: Yes. You spent some time in Le Havre, France, and then were transported back to the United States.

J: No. No. I spent some time in the evacuation hospital.

T: That's where we left you a few moments ago. You were in the evacuation hospital.

J: I don't know where the evacuation hospital was, but it wasn't Le Havre. Then I flew in a C-47, two engine [transport] plane, along with a group of other prisoners from the evacuation hospital to the 108th General Hospital, in Paris, France.

T: That's right. That was in your records too.

J: Yes. I spent a week there maybe. We were getting fed well and we were starting to recoup a little. At that point in time I was starting, which I didn't realize, I thought I was gaining weight, but I was gaining water. Then the doctor told me to stay in bed and don't even raise my head. Those days we would eat anything that moved. I would eat my meal in the hospital on the fourth floor and I would walk down the stairs to the cafeteria and eat in the cafeteria.

T: Do you remember yourself being very hungry?

J: Oh, you would eat anything that moved.

T: It was you eating often and a lot, it sounds like.

J: Yes. Yes. But he wanted me to stay in bed because I had liquid in my legs.

T: From too much too fast?

J: Yes. Water. There's a word for it and I can't think of it. I noticed one day when I was sitting on the edge of the hospital bed. I crossed my legs, like this (*crosses legs*). I thought I was gaining weight. But I uncrossed my legs and there was a big dent in my flesh. That was water. That was like a pocket. You know what I mean? My legs looked solid, but they weren't solid. And he says you keep your head down. Don't even raise it. Just stay there. Eat your food in the bed. Any POWs at that time, all you could think about was food. Positively. All you thought about. You would eat anything that moved.

T: While you were a prisoner, too, was food a popular topic of conversation?

J: That's all it was. I have some copies of pictures here. My parents. And on the back of them are written recipes of how to baste a turkey. That's all you talked about. Food. The GI, all he talked about in training is women. A POW, all he talks about is food. I'll tell you that.

(2, B, 682)

T: How things change, right?

J: Yes. Sure changed. It didn't take too many months after we were liberated to think the other way. While you were a POW and while you are recouping it's nothing but food. I ate three meals from the time I left the hospital until I got to the... what's the big name of the airport in Paris?

T: Orly?

J: Yes. I think so. I had a chicken dinner at the hospital. I had two chicken dinners out at the airport waiting to fly out the next morning. Eat, eat. And on the C-54 coming home. When we landed at Billy Mitchell Field, Long Island, it was Sunday morning. I can't remember the date. May 5 I think. It was early in the morning. The mess hall was being prepared for breakfast and there were twenty-three of us off of this one airplane.

T: All ex-POWs?

J: Most all of them. There were a few wounded. Battle casualties. Most of them were POWs. When we came into the kitchen, when we came into the steps up at the mess hall, right at the front door was a big bushel basket of bananas. By the time we left that mess hall and went back they were all gone.

T: You ate them all?

J: Yes. I told you, we'd eat the wallpaper off the wall. There's nothing like hunger, I tell you. You don't want to experience it.

T: How long of that kind of eating before you started to settle down and feel like you weren't hungry all the time?

J: That was a Sunday, so we layed over Sunday. They sent me out to a local family's house for dinner. You're still shaky and you feel like you have to go to the bathroom all the time. I wasn't very comfortable. It was very nice of them. I went back to camp. The next morning they flew me to Indianapolis, Indiana. Then I was at Billings General Hospital, in Indianapolis. That's pretty close to my home. Seventy-five miles away. The nurse told me when we went in, she said, "You've got the top diet of anything you want. You ever want ice cream, call us." And they had it there.

Available. So at that time we were able to eat more. They were treating the POWs very graciously. They knew we wanted nothing but food.

T: How long did the diarrhea or dysentery effects stay with you?

J: I can't remember. Not too long after liberation; when I was in the evacuation tent hospital I knew I still had diarrhea pretty bad. But I think [by] the time I got down to the Paris hospital these pills, these four glasses about that full of white pills during the day, had started to plug me up enough so that I was starting to get solid again. I don't remember having to rush to the bathroom at the Paris hospital. Maybe I did, but I can't remember. All I knew is that all I was thinking about was food and waiting for my name to be called out to get on an airplane to go home.

(2, B, 719)

T: About going home. Let me talk about that. Because you were married in 1943.

J: Yes. After Basic Training I wrote my sweetheart and asked her to ask my mother if we could get married. And so we did.

T: And by the time you got back you had a son as well.

J: Ten months old when I got home.

T: What kind of thoughts did you have of your wife, of your son, while you were a POW?

J: If you want to ask me what kept me going while I was a POW, it was my son, and my wife, and my parents. And I have the pictures there in the diary. I have my mother and dad's picture with recipes on the backs of them.

T: You had these pictures with you?

J: Yes. I've got them right there.

T: You carried those pictures while you were a POW?

J: Yes. I had a billfold, I think is what I had. They were with me. That's what kept us going. You ask me what kept us going. That's what kept us going.

T: What news did you have from them? What news did they have of you?

J: I had no news from them. While we were at Stalag IV-B at Mühlberg I was able to write two postcards on my birthday, January 10. They're called *Kriegsgefangen Post*, which is a prisoner of war postcard. They go through the Red Cross system and then eventually get back. Most of those got back after I was liberated.

T: They had only the telegram that you were missing in action.

J: Speaking of telegrams, even the telegrams were delayed you know. I was in Billy Mitchell Field, Long Island, when my parents and wife learned that I was a prisoner of war.

T: Oh, boy. So months and months of delay.

J: Yes.

T: Were you able to call them right away from Long Island?

J: Yes. We got to call. Back in those days you didn't have cell phones. You know what I mean? We got one call. When we landed at Billy Mitchell Field we were entitled to one call at the Post Exchange. To call home.

T: Do you remember your call?

J: I remember calling. I remember my wife wasn't home. She lived with my parents. But my mother was home. I talked to her. I really don't remember much about the conversation. Although I remember something about my mother, about them saying that Betty, my wife, was down at the neighbor's house, three or four houses away and they called her to come. Maybe I did talk to my wife. That's funny. I can't remember.

T: How soon after that did you get to see them?

J: I landed in the States May 5. I think I spent a week or a couple of weeks—I would have to look at my diary. Again, this many years have sort of... time kind of compacts.

T: And these are specific things we're talking about too. Did you stay at Billy Mitchell Field for a while then?

J: No. Just overnight. Over a weekend. They didn't fly out there on Sunday. I flew home on a Monday.

T: Yes. It says you flew to Indianapolis the 6th of May to Stout Field.

J: Landed on May 5. I flew to Indianapolis on the 6th of May. I got a phone call from there, of course. From the hospital.

(Brief pause in tape)

J: I landed on May 5. I went to Indianapolis Billings Hospital on May 6. It looks like according to my notes that it was May 20 before I got home.

T: Did your wife or your folks come to see you at Billings?

J: No. Things were different back then. We never made phone calls like we make now.

T: It's completely different now.

J: Completely. Just totally and completely different. I was only seventy-five miles from home.

T: Yes. That was a longer distance then.

J: Today they would drive over there, but in those days no.

T: So they waited for you to...

J: Come home. Yes.

T: When you got home, that was around May 20 approximately. So you'd been liberated for five weeks or so then. So the worst of it, your condition...

J: I was in really good shape. At Billings General Hospital we had the top diet of every diet in the hospital. You know what I mean? The classification. We could have ice cream any time we wanted it. We could have a chocolate bar. Whatever. The POWs were being treated very nicely.

T: As many calories as you wanted.

J: Yes.

T: And whenever you wanted them.

J: Yes. At that time the diarrhea had stopped. My body was building back up.

End of Tape 2. Tape 3, Side A, begins at counter 000.

T: When you got to see your folks and your wife again, to be reunited with them, what was that like? A lot of change since you left.

J: Let me tell you about the trip home.

T: Yes. Please. Because they picked you up in the car, did they?

J: Oh, no. I came home on a bus. Billings General Hospital is in Indianapolis, so I got a pass, I got a trip ticket and got on the bus. Seventy-five miles home. And Terre Haute, Indiana, is on route 40 east and west. Seventy-five miles from Indianapolis. My folks lived on the east side of town, which put them in near proximity of when you first enter the town. The bus station is central Terre Haute. I decided to get off the bus just south of my home, about a mile and a half. You know, Main Street comes into town. My house was north. I don't remember how many blocks. I made the bus driver stop, which he didn't mind doing, because I said I want to get off here. I'm going to walk home. I ran home.

T: Were you in uniform by the way?

J: Oh, yes. Yes. I practically ran home because I was so anxious to get home. I have a little story to tell about that. I had a bulldog. Mother told me later that the bulldog was going wild just before I got home. With no indication of why she was. She was at the back door scrabbling on the back door. There must be something there. There's got to be a connection. That was me, running from Main Street. One and a half miles up to the house. However far it was. Twelve blocks, fourteen blocks. I couldn't wait to get to the bus station, so I took my knapsack and I had a little satchel full of cigarettes. My wife smoked at that time. She said, if you bring anything home, bring some cigarettes because they had been rationed. So I was taking chocolate and cigarettes home. I didn't smoke myself. As I got home, just before I came home, my mother said that my bulldog was practically clawing the rear door down. Never did that before. So when I got home, I was greeted by my mother and my wife, because my dad was working. And my bulldog. That was the greatest thing in my life.

(3, A, 50)

T: That's very interesting about the dog. That it may have sensed something.

J: Yes. And I had a bottle of perfume that I bought for my wife in Paris, France. I carted it all the way home and a friend of my mother's, Vivian Paver, she's dead now bless her soul, she was so excited and then I said, "Here, look at this. What I brought home to Betty." I brought home some perfume. She grabbed for the bottle of perfume and knocked it out of my hand and broke the thing.

T: So all those steps along the way and it drops and breaks in your house.

J: Yes. Yes. What days those were. I choke up just thinking about them.

T: It seems almost, and I've not been through such a situation, that the emotions can almost be overwhelming.

J: Oh, they are. They were.

T: What do you say to each other after a situation like that?

J: You just hug each other and thank God you're there. It's a great experience.

T: Yes. After what you had been through I imagine it must have been.

J: We were young and innocent kids, literally speaking.

T: You were eighteen when you went in the service, right?

J: Yes. I was only twenty years old when I got liberated. I was twenty years old. I couldn't vote yet. I had been through all that.

T: You were discharged from the service in October and spent time in and out of Benjamin Harrison Hospital between May and October?

J: I went back to the hospital after the first visit, of course. But then I was released for another hospital leave. I actually had five months leave. I had two months hospital leave and I think I went back in one month. I think I went back and then was released the next day to come back home. They were just checking up. Just to check up on me. Then I had what they call three months RAMP. Repatriated Allied Military Personnel, or American Military Personnel. RAMP leave. Every prisoner of war was entitled to three months RAMP time. After my first two months of sick leave then I got the three months of RAMP leave, so altogether I had five months of leave. So that brought me up until when?

T: End of September.

J: Yes. Then they shipped me down to... where did I go? Chattanooga, Tennessee. Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia. For reassignment. Then the [atomic] bomb [was] dropped [by the United States on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, on 6 and 9 August 1945] and we didn't have to be reassigned.

T: And you were discharged December 13, 1945.

J: Yes.

(3, A, 103)

T: I want to spend the last little bit of time talking about your adjustment to civilian life. I mean, for all of our military interviewees, military service is a chapter of people's lives and people's lives go forward from there. Let me start with this. What was your initial reaction to being out of the military?

J: I was happy to be out of the military.

T: So you're not a person who considered making the military a career?

J: Oh no. No. I don't know. I don't remember my exact feelings then, except I was just glad to be out of the Army.

T: Did you go right back to work after you got out of the service in December?

J: I had worked with International Harvester at the downtown office in Terre Haute, Indiana, in the parts department, while I was still on leave. I went back to work part time while I was home on leave. Because five months is too much.

T: To sit around.

J: You can't sit around. So I remember going back to work part time even while I was still in the service, just to be occupied. Because too much free time. That I remember very distinctly. So when I got ready to be discharged I had to go back to Indianapolis to Camp Atterbury. I was discharged from Camp Atterbury. It happened to be a reception center.

T: Right.

J: So I went back and only spent, I think, two nights there and was out.

T: Were you living with your folks at that time?

J: Yes. My wife and I lived with my folks at that time. We had a little apartment in my folks' house.

(Brief pause in tape)

T: When we started to talk today you mentioned, you alluded to, the adjustment process and that you had dreams or images that came back to you. That stayed with you over the years. I'm wondering if you can talk about that. What kind of images stayed in your mind long after your war experience?

J: What I really meant by that is that I can recall it easy. In other words, if I got my mind on the subject of what happened there, I could recall it very easily. I can see that in my mind like a photograph. I don't know if that's a way to explain it or not.

T: Very clearly though.

J: Yes. Very clearly. For ten years after the war I could still hear the mortar shells. I could hear this *(makes sound: chuu-chuu-chuu-chuu-chuu)* whisper of the mortar shells coming down. Eventually that went away. But for those years right after the war those sounds and those sights were there in your mind very, very strong.

T: Are there certain times that those sounds or memories seem to come to you more than others?

J: They don't come to my mind as much as they used to, but when you see what's going on on the TV today and things like that it brings back memories. There's no question about it.

T: Your family. Your wife or your son, your folks, how much of your war or POW experience did you share with them?

J: I shared every bit of it with them. A lot of people say they don't talk about their experiences.

T: Yes, they do say that.

J: I think it's the worst thing in the world. I think you have to get this out of your system. You have to talk about it. I don't remember back in those years between the war and up until—I told you about when I finally got up here, getting acquainted with the VA system?

T: Yes. Mid-80s. Right.

J: There were years back in those years where I didn't talk about it. Except to family. Or somebody'd say, were you a POW? There were a few people who knew I was a POW. Not as many as know now. I didn't talk about it as much back in those years. I think it's just a natural thing. You go to war to win. You don't go to war to be captured. I think that psychologically affects you for a long, long time. Like I told you, did I relate earlier about the guy at the bar telling [me] "You let the Germans through the line." I mentioned that before, didn't I?

T: Yes. It was off the tape. Yes.

J: Things like that stick around for a long time.

T: In other words, this country won the war, but you were a prisoner of war and therefore those experiences are kind of different. While we won, you weren't part of it.

(3, A, 175)

J: See, psychologically I believe you think... and you read articles about we nearly lost a division. We did nearly lose a division. We lost two regiments. Trapped by two divisions. You think about that, and you say, boy, we didn't do much, did we? Really, we didn't. You ask me if I killed a German. No. I didn't kill a German. Not that I know about. I mean that I can positively say that. Some people ask you those questions. They say, how many Germans did you kill? I look at them and I say I

didn't kill any. I'm not ashamed of not killing any. If circumstances were such and I could have, I would have. But we didn't stand a chance. The day we were captured we didn't stand one chance of doing anything. We were so pinned down. With so much artillery. It was just hell.

T: How did you censor or modify what you told your family or your coworkers or friends about your experience?

J: I don't quite understand the question.

T: Were you able to tell them everything, or were there certain things you held back on, or maybe softened, or didn't quite give all the gory details on?

J: I don't think I held back too much when people would ask me about my war experience.

T: Has that always been the case? Right after the war? Or was it only in later years that that was so?

J: We didn't talk about it much right after the war. So there wasn't that much conversation about it. It's been more since... actually since I woke up in 1987 getting with the VA program and getting next to some of my peers. It seemed like we talk more now. But that, psychologically, Dr. Engdahl will tell you, that's the best thing you can do.

T: Yes. That's right. You mentioned this VA program in the mid-80s. For the record, what is it that after thirty, forty-some years made you step forward and contact the VA?

J: As I said, I met one of my peers, one of the veterans from the 106th. I came across him. I can't even relate exactly how I came across him. Robert Sandburg from St. Paul. That name, I think, used to be pretty big in St. Paul. Bob was a veteran. He was with the 81st Engineers and he was in a little town north of me in Auw, where the Germans busted through on our north flank. And he had a tough time and he was a prisoner also. But he wasn't on this long march like I was. But Bob was the one that got me going on the POW system in the VA. It's available. They have a so-called POW Protocol Exam which was... we were back in 1986. It must have been 1982 that that had come into effect. But I didn't know about it until '87. Okay. We got with him and he said, "Have you ever had your Protocol Exam?" I said, "What's that?" He said, "It's a medical exam for ex-POWs." Well, that got me into that ex-POW program. One thing led to another. I took my Protocol Exam. I took my medical exam, which I thought was the most lousy exam I ever had in my life by the VA at that time. They've changed tremendously since. The doctor that examined me, I didn't even feel that he cared whether I was a POW or what I was, you know. It was a bad experience. But the Protocol Exam proved that I still had some psychological effects of being a prisoner.

T: I see.

J: Through that I had my Protocol Exam. I was awarded ten percent [disability] for post-trauma stress. This exam, the medical examiner gave me a little mental profile type thing and it showed up that I had some problems with that. But then I volunteered, as I told you, for the sleep study test later on. In and out of the VA. If there is a volunteer program, I usually sign up for whatever. You know, if they've got some. Right now I volunteered; I'm part of a shingles program. There's a new medicine for shingles and I'm on that program. I don't have shingles, but I'm one of the guinea pigs.

T: I see.

J: They've done such a good job for me that I try to help the VA. This is gone over a period of time now. We're talking of a span from 1987 up to now. But I got with the program. Let's put it this way. I got with the program. Then I had my sleep study test, which proved that I was not getting good sleep. Then back a few years ago we had a meeting of about a hundred ex-POWs at a meeting where the VA got up and said—this was brought on by the Korean War: frozen feet. Anybody having problems with your feet? Come on back to the desk at the back of the room and sign up and we'll take care of you. That brought up the cold. My dear wife, who I married twenty-four years ago, wondered why I'd been wearing socks to bed all my life. That was why. Now I have some problems with my fingers. It might be the same thing. Just to put it on the record, I'm drawing a hundred percent compensation. I'm drawing fifty percent for post-trauma stress. I'm drawing thirty percent on each foot. Ten percent for irritable bowel. The VA has been treating me well.

(3, A, 259)

T: I know you are part of a group that Dr. Engdahl runs with ex-POWs of the Japanese, of the Germans and also of Korea and Vietnam. What's been the importance to you of that group?

J: I don't know. I think it's just the camaraderie. The getting together with somebody that had similar experiences. When I was first asked to join the group, Dr. Engdahl said, "Why don't you join our group?" I said, "You've got prisoners who were Japanese [POWs] for three and half years. I was only a prisoner for four months." He said, "That doesn't make any difference." It doesn't. I made little excuses when I first joined them. I said, "You guys were prisoners for three and a half years. I was only a prisoner for four months." They said that doesn't make any difference. You were a prisoner and you got pretty roughly treated the four months, you were a prisoner.

T: That's true.

J: They said it doesn't make any difference. They said, "I wouldn't have wanted to fight in the snow like you did." It's a bunch of nice guys. We have aviators that were shot down over Holland. We got three that were shot down over Germany. One that was shot down over Japan, and didn't see daylight for about three months.

T: We interviewed him. Bob Michelsen, I think.

J: Yes. You know, you talk to these guys and you're just buddies. You're part of a group. You're part of a group. Now just before I ever joined this group I was in another great group where Dr. Stendahl... there's Dr. Engdahl... what was the other doctor's name? It was Engdahl and another one. We had a combat veteran's group. There were twelve us started out. It got down to about six right away. Some people lose interest. And we met every Monday morning, I think, for several months. There was a guy who was on a mine sweeper. He was in the Navy on a mine sweeper in the South Pacific. Had five ships sunk under him. The thing that bothered him the most was the bodies they had to haul onto the floor of the mine sweeper, to haul them away from the island to get them back to the United States. Some of the stories you hear are terrorizing. You look at yourself and say, well, I walked five hundred miles. So what? But they look at you and say, you're part us. You're my buddy. That's what makes you feel good.

T: So you hear other stories and the temptation is to say that that person's experience was worse than mine.

J: Oh, every one of them I hear seems worse than mine. I mean, no kidding. That's why when I first started going to this group with Engdahl I thought, what am I really doing here? I asked him. I said, "Look, I was only a prisoner for four months. I'm going to be sitting across from a guy that was a prisoner for three and a half years." He said don't let it bother you. It doesn't. As a matter of fact I'm a big part of the group.

T: How long have you been going to that group now?

J: It seems like two years now. I don't know.

T: You find it really helpful.

J: It's the greatest thing in the world. I wouldn't miss one if I had to. Dr. Engdahl's wife, Dr. Eberley, who I didn't know was his wife, but it is, is at the Vet Center in St. Paul. I go to a meeting there the same day I go to the meeting here at two o'clock on the first and third Tuesdays. I go to a meeting on the first and third Tuesdays at the Vet center. But there it's a small group and I'm the only POW. As a matter of fact, off the record, the group I think is about ready to fall apart because there's not just that much to keep it going. But there is one gentleman in there that I was with in this earlier group I told you about. We called it the Combat Peer Group, the one [with]

the Navy guy. There were three machine gunners. One of them landed at D-Day. Went all the way through the Bulge. I think of my psychological... how it affected me. It affected him greatly. His biggest memory of the war is coming off of D-Day going through the villages and seeing the paratroopers hanging up in the trees with their—excuse my language—with their balls cut off. Things like this. Being with this group has really enriched my life as far as I am concerned.

(3, A, 317)

T: Has it helped you better to understand and accept your own experience?

J: I didn't accept my own experience. I didn't recognize, that's the word to use, my own hang-ups, let's say, throughout life. I look back sometimes and I say, well, I wonder if they really did affect me that much. They must have. I just didn't recognize it. Because things began to put things in focus. My experience, I can say that my experience, wasn't as bad as Claire's who saw the paratroopers hanging, yet in another way, he looks at me and said, "I couldn't have walked five hundred miles."

T: It helps to hear that other people say that what you went through was pretty serious.

J: Yes. It was. Now you look back, it wasn't that easy.

T: You know the walk you went on, guys didn't make it.

J: Yes. I didn't hear of many deaths, but there had to be.

T: That's a lot of time to walk in tough weather without much...

J: A lot of POWs were never found after World War II. Even yet today. They don't talk much about it but there are people missing.

T: That just never got back.

J: The American Ex-Prisoners of War says that there are at least twenty-three ex-POWs that never showed up. That's a national organization of American ex-prisoners of war. Most of them were in a Russian zone.

T: Let me ask, finally, about something else now. You've been going to reunions in the part of your association for about fifteen years as well.

J: Since 1987. My first reunion was in Mobile, Alabama, in 1987.

T: How did you get involved in that, and what's the importance of the association for you?

J: I got involved, when I found out there was an association, in 1987. How did I find that out?

T: Because forty years had gone by and you hadn't been involved.

J: Okay. Back just before I moved here I had contractor clients. I didn't sell automobile insurance and hospital insurance. I was in the contractors business. One of my contractors, I went to lunch with him one day. It was a young man that was running the family business and his father came along. An older guy like me. And we were having lunch. And he said, "Were you in World War II?" I said yes. He was too. That got me thinking about it and he said, "Have you ever heard of the Veterans of the Battle of Bulge? There's an organization VBOB." So I joined up with the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge. And one thing led to another and I finally called the secretary out in Washington. I should know her name. I talked to the secretary. A lady secretary. I said, "Can you get me a list of people who belong to my organization and are in the Veterans of the Battle of the Bulge?" "Certainly, she can," she said, "Didn't you know that the 106th has an association?" I said no.

T: So she told you about it.

J: She told me about the association. And she gave me the name of some people to get a hold of. And so one thing led to another. Then in the meantime I was discovering my peers, my buddies. When I would find another guy, I would keep track of my conversation and I would write a little newsletter at the end of the month to send to the guys I'd already discovered. As I built up the list—I started out sending out five letters, then I'd have ten, fifteen. I would just keep building the list. Then I learned about the 106th Infantry. Out of the first four I learned that there was an association of 106th Infantry. So I joined. When I got their first magazine then I decided to go to that first reunion in 1987 in Mobile, Alabama. In the meantime I had been writing these newsletters and one of the guys was a lieutenant who I didn't know in the war. He said, "John, you're keeping us up to date." He said, "The association lost it's editor of its magazine and you're going to go to Mobile. Why don't you volunteer to take over the magazine?" I said I had never produced a magazine. I said I think I can do it but I never produced a magazine. And he said you can do it. He said you write a nice newsletter to us. It was just nothing but a little newsletter. Then he said go down and volunteer for it. I said you guys told me never to volunteer for anything.

T: They were telling you to volunteer.

J: Now he's telling me to volunteer. Well, I did. I volunteered to and I was accepted very graciously because the editor's wife had been trying to do the magazine during the year that he had died. I came home from the September '87 first reunion I went to in Mobile and put out my first magazine.

T: One final question I wanted to ask. If you think about your war experience as a whole, in a larger sense, John, what do you think is the most important way that the war changed your life?

J: I don't know. How did it change my life? I don't know an exact answer but just thinking about it, it probably changed my life to the effect that my life after the war... it makes me realize that my life was very precious and I got to come back to my family. Many people didn't get to come back to their families as a result of the war. But I'm very thankful that I did get to come back, even though there was a period in my life when I was ashamed that I had been a POW.

T: Thank you for the interview today.

END OF INTERVIEW